

# Telecommunications Co-ops



THE NATION'S 270 LOCAL, CONSUMER-OWNED telecommunications cooperatives provide advanced telecommunications services to rural America, helping to bridge the digital divide. On average each employs 47 people, serves nearly 8,000 customers, and generates more than \$8 million in revenues annually. But these co-ops aren't just telecommunications companies. Every day, they go beyond their core business, demonstrating their community commitment by donating financial resources and technical help to spur economic development, meet unmet needs, and ensure a brighter future for the communities they serve. Here are just a few examples of telecommunications cooperatives' commitment to their communities.

## *Economic Development*

**Heart of Iowa Communications Cooperative**, Union, Iowa. To keep business thriving in the small towns it serves, Heart of Iowa Communications Cooperative launched an economic development program that has created key community services, developed new businesses and fostered new housing. In the early 1990s, recognizing the need for health care and other services for an aging population, the small co-op secured a \$400,000 federal grant to build an assisted care facility in Hubbard. With an additional infusion of \$200,000 from the co-op's own accounts, the town now has a quality care facility with an Alzheimer's unit. And that was just the beginning. Through its revolving fund, the co-op provides more than \$1 million in low-interest and interest-free loans for projects including an assisted living facility, an eight-unit apartment building, three new restaurants, a town hall, and new fire trucks.

**ENMR Plateau Telecommunications**, Clovis, New Mexico. As part of a 50-year commitment to supporting community needs, ENMR Plateau Telecommunications sets aside \$150,000 each year for economic development grants, workforce training, disaster and housing assistance, and youth services. The project has funded an economic development office, supported small business loans, helped remodel a city office, funded a domestic violence program, and made a library accessible to the handicapped. In the first six months of 2004, the co-op provided 15 grants to local organizations. To encourage youth to return to these rural areas, another ENMR grant program reimburses those who agree to return home for at least two years after graduation for a portion of their education costs.

### *Caring for the Community*

**Peoples Rural Telephone Cooperative**, McKee, Kentucky. In a partnership with the Center for Rural Development in Somerset, Peoples Rural Telephone Cooperative provided a high-speed Internet connection for McKee’s CenterNet, a local resource center. Residents now can access the Internet, take distance-learning courses and participate in video-conferences. The co-op also has facilitated the creation of local telemedicine services by donating a high-speed connection and providing video conferencing capabilities to a health clinic.

**Horry Telephone Cooperative**, Conway, South Carolina. The MetroNetwork project is improving local health care by connecting hospitals and their rural satellite facilities. Hospitals can transfer patient files electronically, which previously had to be transported by courier. The co-op also has linked Horry County high schools, so that they can share information and provide distance-learning courses.

**Roggen Telephone Cooperative Company**, Roggen, Colorado. An increasing number of Roggen Telephone Company’s members are elderly and living alone in rural areas. They need a way to get help in an emergency. The co-op created an emergency contact system by offering seniors “telemergency” phones at cost, just \$5 per month. The phones can be pre-programmed with emergency numbers. They also offer a “lifeline” pendant for contacting 911 away from a phone. The co-op provides free installation of the system.

### *Committed to Children*

**Consolidated Telcom**, Dickinson, North Dakota. Consolidated Telcom donated time and resources to an interactive distance-learning network that connects five rural high schools and three universities. The network allows students in rural areas to take high school classes not offered locally as well as college courses offered by distant universities. Consolidated Telcom conducted a feasibility study for the system, identified the optimal technology, donated engineering services, and helped fund equipment needed to upgrade the schools’ telecommunications infrastructure. Today, Consolidated continues to offer the participating schools deep discounts on monthly service.

**Nemont Telephone Cooperative**, Scobey, Montana. Nemont Telephone’s mentoring program allows high school students to go through mock interviews and work with the co-op’s human resources department to tailor their resumes to specific jobs. Students also can “shadow” a co-op employee working in their area of interest and attend a two-week Telephony Academy at Bismarck State College. Since the program’s inception in 1999, more than 250 high school students from 10 school districts have participated. The co-op also offers students college scholarships.

**XIT Rural Telephone Cooperative**, Dalhart, Texas. XIT Rural Telephone uses unclaimed patronage capital credit checks to fund scholarships for high school seniors. The co-op offers five \$2,000 scholarships to high school seniors based on community involvement, academic achievement, extracurricular, and financial need. The co-op makes payments directly to the school, reducing financial burdens on the families.